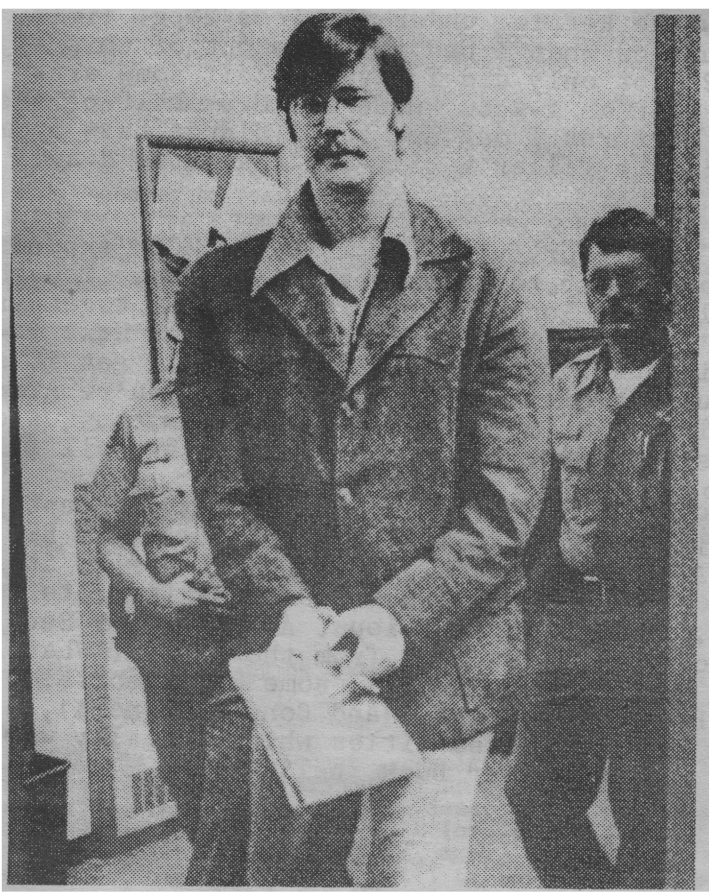
Murder Can Be Fun

No. 8 — 75¢

Ed Kemper:



"Shut up, Ma"

Johnny Marr
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San Francisco, CA 94109

I've had it. I can't go on like this, trying to cram as much as I can into each issue of MCBF while keeping under the 1 oz/20pg. limit. Do you know what I had to leave out of this issue? Not only did I have to edit some articles with an X-acto knife and drop half of the neato pictures I dug up, but I didn't have room for all the filler & clip-art that I so dearly love.

Thus, after surviving for 2 years, MCBF expands once again, up to 32 (maybe 36!) pages. Though it will take longer to put the monster together, there'll be so much more fun stuff... Next issue will be a double (#9/10), & you'll get it even if your sub dies with #9, though if you're nice you'll send me 50¢ or a coupla stamps to square things up. Everyone else must pay the full $1!!

But #9/10 isn't for a while, yet. My current project is THE MCBF HISTORY OF TEENAGE ADVICE BOOKS or, HAIRY PALMS & HORMONES. Out in April, it'll be my usual ravings about one of my favorite subjects. Besides the obvious(Abby, Ann, & Beth), I'm covering a few gems from the 1890s ("What A Young Man Ought To Know"), some by celebrities (Pat Boone, Dick Clark, and Connie Francis), and a few really twisted titles which actually work. It'll be worth your buck, believe me.

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MCBF Update...

Big news this time is the new Mayor of San Francisco, Art Agnos is an authentic celebrity. Back in the '70s, the Zebra Killers pumped a few bullets into him as he walked to a community meeting. This should give him an interesting perspective on street crime... & speaking of attempted assassins (does Squeaky count?), Andy Warhol's nemesis, Valerie Solanas (see MCBF #3) is rumoured to be coming out with another book. A sequel to THE SCUM MANIFESTO? No word yet in FORTHCOMING BOOKS IN PRINT, so this could just be a dream.

VC Andrews may be dead, but don't tell her agent. Two new VC's out since she croaked at the end of last year, including the just released prequel to FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC, GARDEN OF SHADOWS (good, but not great - needs more sex), as well as a pathetic movie of FLOWERS. Some genius in Hollywood takes a novel about incest & cuts out all the incest to get a PG rating... Makes you wonder what's going to happen to the movie they're making on the 1919 Black Sox World Series (MCBF #7). Cut out all bribes so the kiddies won't get ideas?

Book banning is becoming the in thing these days, & is spreading from the traditional targets like HUCK FINN , CATCHER IN THE RYE, & the collected works of Judy Blume. Latest addition: Lois Duncan's KILLING MR. GRIFFIN. Typically, if the censors had bothered to read the thing, they would have found out that the book isn't about murdering teach, but about one who dies of a heart attack in the course of a stupid (is there any other kind?) high school prank... also very heavily banned is Robert Comier's THE CHOCLATE WAR. Take it as a recommendation.

Publications:

BACK ISSUES: #1 - #7 are all back in print for only 50¢ each, postpaid.

THE MCBF 1988 DATEBOOK: Yes, it is out - the only calendar anyone needs for 1988. A special event for each day to cheer your way through the year: Manson's birthday, Fatty Arbuckle Day, the Great Boston Molasses Flood, plus space to write in your own special events. 56 pgs, $2 postpaid. ~~out of print!~~

COMING SOON:

TEENAGE ADVICE BOOKS 1890 - 1980 due out in April. 32 pgs., ~~$1~~ 1.25

MCBF #9/10 (Double issue!) June, $1.

MURDER CAN BE FUN is published at irregular regular intervals by John Marr. All contents are © 1987 by the aforementioned. Pirates beware. This issue, and back issues #s 1 through #7 may be purchased by remitting 50¢ CASH (or, if you insist, stamps) to the above address. Checks, money orders, and other such pale imitations of Fed. green will be folded, spindled, and mutilated. Future large sized issues will be available @ $1 each. Prepayment is encouraged. Contrary to popular belief, it is actually very safe to send small amounts of well-wrapped cash through the mails. Evidently, sticky-fingered USPS people tend to wait for the big scores. Kudos this time to Greg Beitel, STREET, SduP, RE/SEARCH, Dan, and everyone else that I don't hate that much right now.

ED KEMPER:

The Co-ed Killer

Ed Kemper's friends always thought of him as "the gentle giant". Even though he was definitely a big guy -- 6' 9", 240 lbs -- he wasn't one to throw his weight around. He was quiet, polite, and even cowardly around his friends. They never thought Ed would hurt a fly. And they were right. All Ed really wanted was to kill his mother, but, unfortunately for the female population of Santa Cruz, CA, he did it in a roundabout way.

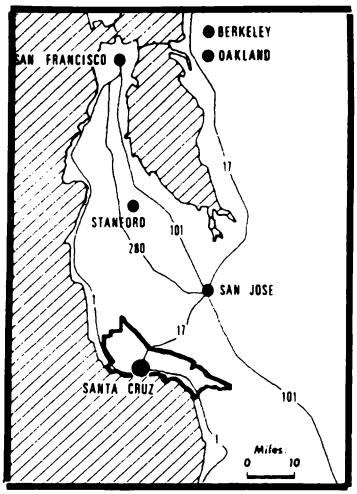
Ed was the 2nd of 3 children (b:12/18/48) born to Ed & Clarnell Kemper. His parents had a very stormy marriage, with lotsa separations & reconciliations which ultimately ended in divorce when Ed was 7. Both parents remarried & Ed was bounced back & forth between the two parents, but he wound up most of the time with his mother, whom he despised as a dominating, castrating bitch.

Ed wasn't so much of a classic problem child as just plain weird. At an early age, he was a devoted nihilist, praying for God to kill everyone on earth except him. Symbolic of his love/hate relationship with his mother, & foreshadowing his later activities with the opposite sex, he chopped the heads & hands off his sister's dolls. He got this idea that the only way he could relate to anyone was if they were dead. When he was 10, he killed his first cat "to make it his". Afterwards, he chopped off its head & kept it in his room for the next several weeks. At one point, he had a little-boy crush on one of his teachers, but when his sisters teasingly suggested that he kiss her, he replied that he would have to kill her first.

It's the age-old question of heredity vs. environment: how much of this was Ed's psycho genes & how much was his mother. Ed, of course, points his finger at Mother, & lord knows she isn't talking. Ed's father, a member of the Special Forces in World War II, claimed that suicide missions were nothing compared to living with Clarnell. He re-enlisted once just to get away from her!

Heredity or environment, it got worse when Ed hit his teens. Using the skills he learned in Boy Scouts & NRA shooting classes, he made a regular hobby out of killing & dismembering the neighborhood pets. Clarnell finally gave up on him when she found the remnants of the family cat in his bedroom. She sent him to his father who shipped him out to his parents, Ed's paternal grandparents. Clarnell didn't think this was a good idea: "You might be surprised to wake up some morning to learn that they've been killed".

She was right. The one thing 15-year old Ed hated more than living with her was living with his grandparents. On August 27, 1964, he got to thinking: "I wonder how it would feel to shoot grandma?" Sneaking up behind her, he shot her in the head with the rifle his grandfather had given him. To be safe, he shot her twice more & stabbed her a few times. When his grandfather came home, Ed started to worry that he would have a heart attack when he saw his late wife, so he shot him before he got inside.



Ed Kemper's Mother's head

They sent Ed to Atascadero State Mental Hospital for this little stunt. He did get some decent mental treatment there -- for one thing, he learned that "I really killed my grandmother because I wanted to kill my mother" -- but far more important for his later exploits were the things that he wasn't supposed to learn.

During Ed's formative years, instead of being out on the streets learning about sex like any other red-blooded American boy, he was locked up with a bunch of rapists, perverts, ano child molesters. He wasn't in any physical danger himself - even at 15, he was big enough to beat off any unwelcome advances - but think of the late-night bull sessions he sat in on. Definitely unhealthy.

On the outside, Ed adjusted well to the hospital, but it was more that he was acting better than getting better. Ed was a smart guy and he rapidly learned the delicate art of fooling the psychiatrists.

By 1970, he'd convinced them he was sane enough to leave, so the hospital turned him over to the California Youth Authority, stipulating that he be released to anyone but his mother.

Within weeks, Ed was back with his mother in Santa Cruz, where she'd taken a high-level job at the University. To her credit, Clarnell didn't have to take him, but she volountered - and, in a fit of extremely poor judgement, the CYA agreed.

Things had changed in the 5 years Ed had been in. In 1965, everything was short haired & clean cut, and now, in 1970, it was long hair and freaked out. But what struck Ed the most were the hordes of hitchhikers, especially the girls, that had their thumbs out on every street.

What Ed really wanted to be was a cop, but, at 6' 9", he was over the max height for every department in the country. He wound up taking a highway maintenance job and moving to Alameda, near Oakland. He still visited his mother frequently, even though they still really didn't get along. She still kept a room for him where he could sleep after coming home for a quick knock-down, drag-out fight. Things hadn't changed.

Then, on one fatefull day in 1972, a car jumped a red light & plowed into Ed on his motorcycle. He wasn't hurt seriously,

but enough to sue for & collect a tidy $15,000 settlement. With this, he was able to quit his job, giving him plenty of free time to cruise the freeways picking up hitchhikers & imagining his peculiar nihilistic fanatsies.

Finally, on May 7, 1972, Ed decided to act out his fantasies. He picked up two first (& last!) time hitchers, Anita Luchesa & Mary Ann Pesce in Berkeley. They were two Fresno State students who were up to visit friends at Berkeley & Stanford. Ed immediatly scoped that they were both naive & completely unfamiliar with the Bay Area. Instead of driving them to their intended destination of Palo Alto, they found themselvs driving through the deserted farmland outside of Livermore.

It was hardly elegant. By the time he stopped the car, both girls knew something was up, and Ed himself was as nervous as hell. He talked Anita into getting into the trunk, & then handcuffed Mary Ann to the rear seat & gagged her. He tried to stab her in the back, but kept on hitting her backbone. Finally, after repeated ineffectualy staps, he simply slashed her throat.

He then went back to the trunk to take care of Anita. She saw him drenched in blood & immediatly fought back. There was a struggle, during which Ed managed to stab himself in the hand, but which ended with Anita's throat also slashed.

He carried both bodies back to his apartment. There, he dissected Mary Ann and decapitated both girls. He carefully buried them in separte graves the next day (remembering his boyscout training!) & tossed the heads into a ravine. Mary Ann's head was found the next week, but nothing else was ever recovered.

Ed's next victim was 15-year old Aiko Koo, also not an accommplished hitchhiker. She'd just gotten tired of waiting for the Berkeley/San Francisco bus & stuck out her thumb. (9/14/72)

Ed proceeded to pretend to get lost in the maze of SF freeways, & next thing, he had her on a deserted section of the coast highway near Half Moon Bay. He then told her that she was being kidnapped. 30 miles further down, he pulled over, bound & gagged her, and, remembering his previous difficulties with knives, suffocated her into unconciousness. After raping her, he finished choking her to death.

With her body in the trunk, he stopped by a nearby bar for a few quick beers and then drove by his mother's house for a quick visit. Whe he returned to his own apartment in Alameda that night, he took Aiko's body out for the usual decapitation & dissection.

The next day was a big one for Ed. For all their disagreements, Ed's mother had been fighting to have his juvenile records sealed. To do this, Ed had to convince a psychiatrist that he was sane & had successfully adjusted to society. That day, he drove down to Fresno to see & convince the good doctor. And the good doctor was convinced. As soon as the paperwork could go through, Ed's juvenile record would be sealed and officialy, it would be as if he had never shot his grandparents.

They may have had a different opinion if they'd known about Aiko's head, still nestled in the trunk of Ed's car.

On January 8, Ed picked up Cynthia Schall in downtown Santa Cruz, who was hitchhiking to the local JC. He drove her out into the country, forced her into his trunk, & shot her. He took her body to his mother's house, where he was staying for a few days, and hid it in the closet. The next day, after Clarnell had left for work, he took her out, had some post-mortem sex, and dissected her in the bath tub.

He later threw the remains into the ocean.

By the time Cynthia's body washed ashore 2 weeks later, Santa Cruz was in a panic. Between Ed & Herb Mullin (see following article), it was a bad time to be a hitchhiking coed in Santa Cruz. Yet there really was no reliable public transportation between town & campus. It was either car or thumb.

The University tried to counter by publishing guidelines: "Don't hitch a ride, please. If you feel you must hitch a ride ride -- do it with a friend, but not alone. Try to choose cars with University parking decals".

A hell of a lot of good this did. Clarnell had gotten Ed a parking decal so he could get on campus to pick her up after work. On Febuary 5, Ed cruised the campus & picked up Rosalind Thorpe coming out of an evening lecture. She probably felt very safe, seeing the sticker. On the way off campus, Ed picked up another hitching student, Alice Lui. She probably felt doubly safe, seeing the sticker & the other woman.

But so much for the advice of the administation. On the dark, twisty road road between the campus & the town, Ed pulled out a gun and, in a fine display of his NRA-taught marksmanship, shot both women in the head. When he got to his mother's house that night, he decapitated both bodies out in front. He smuggled them in the next morning for the usual sex & dimemberment orgy.

All along, Ed had been extremely careful about avoiding witnesses, burying the bodies well, etc., but he was still jumpy. It just took one cop casually inquiring about the legality of Ed's gun purchases to push him off the deep end. They're on me! Do it Now!

It was time for Ed to kill the one person he really wanted to kill - Mother. As he recalled,"I certainly wanted for my mother a nice quiet easy death like I guess everyone wants." So, Easter Sunday morn, thoughtful son Ed snuck into his mother's bedroom, hit her on the temple with a hammer, slashed her throat, & cut off her head. "Waht's good enough for my victims was good enough for my mother".

It was a life-long dream come true. He chopped out her larynx (voice box) & stuffed in down the garbage disposal. He put her head on the mantelpiece, where he shouted obscenities & threw darts at it. In all, Ed had a grand old time.

But after awhile, he got worried, & decided the thing to do was to kill another of his mother's friends, & then claim they'd gone someplace together. After cleaning up & running a few errands in town, he invited long-time family friend Sally Hallett to dinner with him & his "mother".

Sally came, & as she stepped into the house, said, "Let's sit down. I'm dead". Ed took this as his cue & got to work strangling her.

Thus ended Ed's career in crime. He bopped on down to a local bar to hang out with his cop friends, who only noticed that he was being a little quiet. He then hopped in his car, & for god knows what reaso, drove to Pueblo, Colorado. There, he phoned the Santa Cruz Police Department &, after some extremely funny run-arounds, finally got through to a cop who was willing to believe his confession.

Nutty as he obviously is, under California law, Ed is as sane (or maybe saner!) than you or I, 'cos he knew that what he was doing was wrong: the old M'Naughten rule. Latest word had Ed serving out his life sentence at Vacaville where he makes himself useful by recording talking books for the blind. I see tremendous commercial possibilities here: "The Ed Kemper Greek Tragedy Album: Oedipus Rex b/w Oesestes". They'd probably sell a million.

MORE FUN IN SANTA CRUZ

Ed Kemper wasn't the only reason Santa Cruz residents were lining up at the local gunshops in the early '70s. Up through 1969, Santa Cruz was just another mellow little California beach town with no homicide rate to speak of. Then, in 1970, Helter Skelter came down. Over the next 3 years, no less than three mass murderers struck. In 1972, Santa Cruz had the highest homicide rate in the country, beating out stiff competition from Detroit, New York, and Oakland.

It all started with John Linley Frazier in 1970. Until May of that year, John was just another auto mechanic. Then, an unfortunate combination of an auto accident, some mescaline, and intensive study of the Tarot & the Book of Revelations pushed him off the deep end. He started to call himself the "Knight of Pentacles", dressing & acting like a hippie. He also was completely paranoid.

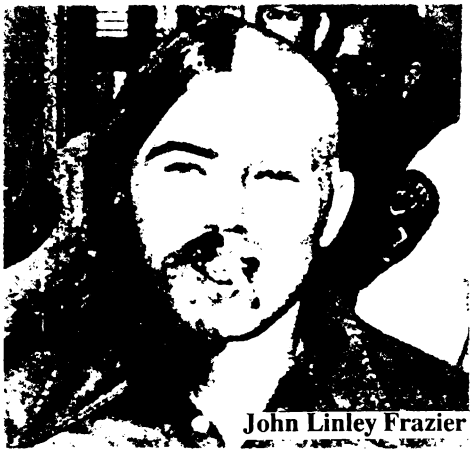
Like many hippies, he was concerned with the environment, but unlike most, he went out & did something about it. On October 19, 1970, he paid a call on the family of Dr. Victor Ohta. The doctor was out, so John (or "The Knight" if you prefer) bound & gagged everyone in the house -- the doctor's wife, 2 sons, and secretary -- and sat back & waited for the "head of the household".

John was intending to recruit Dr. Ohta into his crusade against materialism & destruction of the environment. No dice. When Dr. Ohta got home, he actually attempted to buy John off! Just can't reason... John shot the doctor 3 times, & then finished off the rest of the family execution style - a bullet in the back of the head. He torched the house & stole one of the family cars. Thus ended the great ecology crusade.

The cops caught him a week later, and not a day too soon. The town was on the verge of a civil war between the hips & the straights. His trial was pretty pedestrian until the sanity phase, when John started putting on a show. Taking a cue from the Manson girls, he indulged in a little creative shaving. He shaved halfway - half his hair, half his beard, half his mustache, one eyebron - for a truly startling effect. But the weird thing was his motivation. He did it so the jury would think he was faking insanity. He preferred the gas chamber to the "facist head factory", and he got it, although the Supreme Court had to go out & wreck things. Currently, he's serving a life term for 5 counts of 1st degree murder.

Things were comparatively peaceful for the next year & a half until Ed Kemper started up in April of '72. Then, while Ed was still in the middle of his string, yet another mass murderer started: Herbert Mullin. Think how overworked the cops were!

Herbert Mullin was not the classic killer. Ed Kemper showed a lot of the brilliance in execution that distinguished Ted Bundy; Frazier had some of that hippie-high-on-hate quality of Manson; but Mullin? Well, he really was just your garden schizo listening to voices that said "Kill, kill, kill".



John Linley Frazier

Herbert Mullin

He didn't start out that way. A Santa Cruz native, Herb was the all-American boy: steady girlfriend, good grades, varsity basketball, "most likely to succeed", etc. No hint of any problem. Then, in 1968, he went away to college at San Jose State & discovered acid.

He became completely unhinged, and spent the next few years swinging on a mental pendulum & being bounced in & out of mental hospitals. At one point, he was a full blown hippie, wandering around the streets of Santa Cruz babbling about a confused blend of Eastern religions & filing for a conscientious objector exemption from the draft. He drifted up to San Francisco, living in flophouses & trying to be an artist. But, by 1972, he'd swung back to some cracked version of normalacy: he tried to enlist in the Marines!

But he kept hearing voices, & soon realized it was time to listen. He had an important duty: "Every day people die. There's a steady flow of death in order to keep the coast free of cataclymsic earthquakes & the earth in orbit". Over the next 4 months, Herb did his best to keep the flow of death going to prevent the big quake. For obscure biblical reasons, he had to kill exactly 13 people.

He started on October 13 by bashing in the head of a guy he saw walking along the goad, and continued in this impulsive manner for the next dozen. He never planned things out. When the voices said kill, Herb killed, preferably the nearest available person.

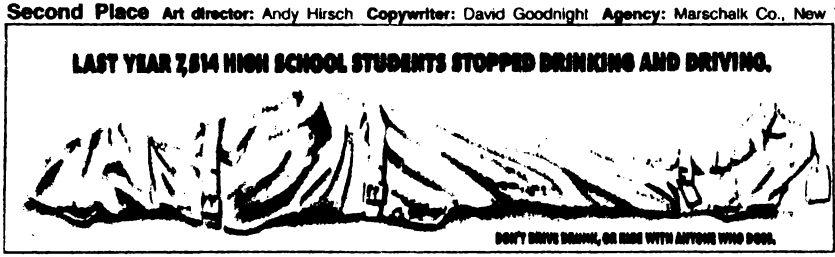
He stabbed a hitchhiking co-ed, and later dissected her, inspired, not by Ed Kemper, but by Irving Stone's AGONY & THE ECSTASY. He stabbed a priest in the confessional, evidentally after having some second thoughts about the confession he'd just made. He surprised a group of campers near his house, & neatly shot 'em all with a single bullet apiece. He killed the guy who'd introduced him to acid in the 1st place.

Finally, on Febuary 13th, the voices told him to kill his last victim. In the middle of a suburban neighborhood in broad daylight, he shot a guy in front of a few witnesses. Thus ended Herb Mullin's career in earthquake prevention. As Ed Kemper said, "Anyone who just runs up to someone, shoots them, & runs away, has no class".

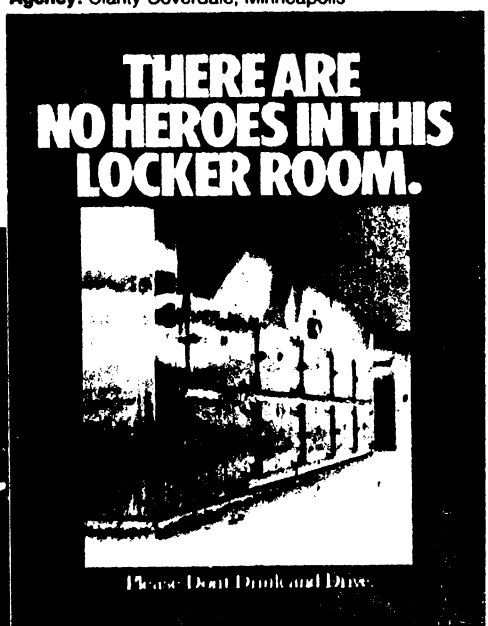
No to show him any favoritism, a Santa Cruz jury found Herb sane, too, & sentenced him to life imprisonment. Makes you wonder just who is really insane.

For The Reader's Digest, 1986 was the Year of the Teen-Age Drunk Driver. The following posters are some of the winners of a RD-sponsored contest among the nation's ad agencies. Copies of these were sent to every high school in the country with no noticable effect on the teen/booze/car death rate.

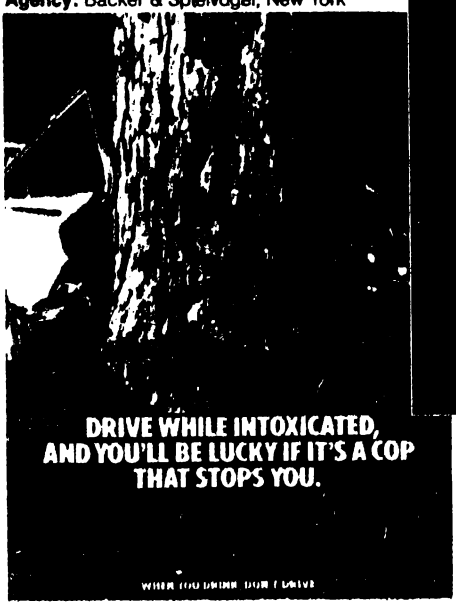
Second Place **Art director:** Andy Hirsch **Copywriter:** David Goodnight **Agency:** Marschalk Co., New York

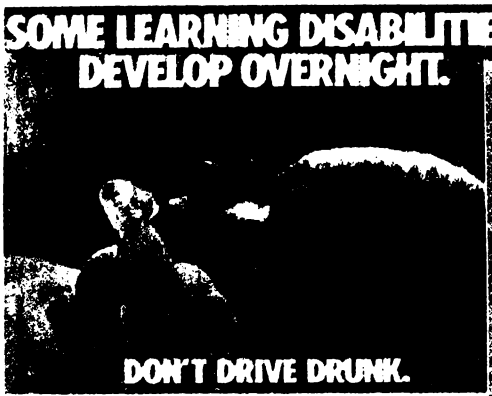


Art director: Carol Mack
Copywriter: Gerry Schmitt
Agency: Clarity Coverdale, Minneapolis



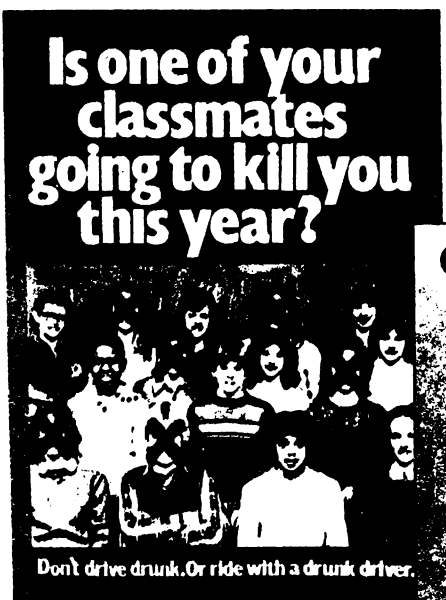
Art director: Shelton Scott
Copywriter: Renee Mandis
Agency: Backer & Spielvogel, New York





Art director: Ray Fesenmaier
Copywriter: Ray Fesenmaier/Mark Warne
Agency: Warne Studios, Minneapolis

Art director: Jennifer Lomas
Copywriter: Nelson Smith
Agency: Anderson Advertising, Toronto



Art director: Ron Anderson
Copywriter: Dick Thomas
Agency: Bozell & Jacobs, Minneapolis

Art director: Tom Roth
Copywriter: Steve Trygg
Agency: Anderson & Lembke, Stamford, Conn.

The Bridge FIASCO

This past year, the 2 biggest bridges across SF Bay - the Golden Gate Bridge & the Bay Bridge - both celebrated their 50th anniversaries with the obligatory massive public celebrations. Ordinarily, these spectacles are pretty grim except for the fireworks & the free admission. The only people who really get excited are politicios out to prove that while they might not be too good at providing bread, but boy!, can they put on a circus! However, the organizers of the Golden Gate bash went one further - they didn't put on a show, they came up with an outright fiasco.

It all started about a year before A (anniversary) Day, set for May 24, 1987. While the Bay Bridge people were planning a nice, simple fireworks show, not one, but two parties were planned for the Golden Gate: one by the Bridge District, and one by some yuppie fundraiser. It was going to be the biggest thing to hit the area since '06 - a combination of V-J Day, the Superbowl Victory riot, and Armageddon all rolled into one massive 3-day extravaganza. And best of all, it wasn't going to cost the taxpayers a single cent! Corporations would literally trip over each other in the rush to underwrite this prestigous, $100 million event.

Except that they weren't, and it's not too hard to figure out why. Unlike the other 7 bridges across the Bay (which are operated by the state), the Golden Gate is owned & operated by its own special district who seem to spend most of their time raising the bridge toll ($1 during the week, $2 on weekends). The PR value of underwriting the parties would be completely lost on the poor slobs who forgot that the day was a $2 day when they only had a buck.

So, over the next few months, plans were scaled back in the face of a complete lack of cash. The three day celebration shrank to one day, and all of the more expensive plans, like the "permanent museum at the toll plaza" were dropped. Still, no money, & it looked like there wouldn't be any party until the Bridge District agreed to cough up some money. Guess there's no such thing as a free party.

Now the controversy switched from $$$$ to the "Great Bridge Walk". Back in 1937, the opening day was reserved for pedestrians. No cars, just people running around, competing to be "the first woman across the bridge", the "first person to

crawl across", etc. All of SF's resident old farts remember this as some sort of glorious highlight of their distant youth, & were agitating to shut down the bridge for the entire day.

You can actually walk across the bridge any day you want. (That's what sidewalks are for!) It's not that big of a deal. But the howl continued - we want to walk across the roadbed. Who cares that shutting down the bridge would back up traffic for miles in Marin & come damn near paralyzing SF?

Saner heads prevailed, and a compromise was reached. The bridge would be closed for 2 hours in the morning, from 6 AM to 8 AM.

And this is where the wise men on the Bridge Board screwed up. They called in a traffic consultant, from LA, of all places,, to estimate the crowds. The official guess was 50,000, though it was suggested that it could run as high as 100,000.

On the morning of May 24, 800,000 people showed up - roughly the combined populations of San Francisco & Marin Counties. And these people didn't just bring themselves. They brought their kids. They brought their dogs. They brought their bikes. They brought their babies (w/strollers). At 5:30, a ½hour before the walk was supposed to start officialy, the mobs overwhelmed the half-dozen highway patrolmen manning the barricades. The Great Bridge Walk was on.

45 minutes later, the crowd from the SF end met the Marin crowd at mid-span, ending the great Bridge Walk, & starting the great Gridlock. The bridge was completely choked with people. There was room for 300,000 people, and every one of them was there, being squeezed in a closely as possible by the 500,000 who couldn't get on. No one could move by themselves - it was only where the crowd itself moved, and it didn't move much.

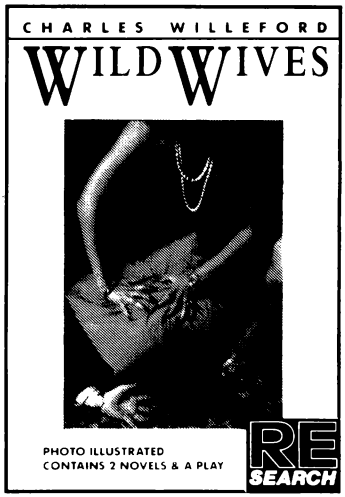
Ordinarily, the main span of the bridge has a slight arch between the towers, but under the weight of all those people, it completely flattened out, and even began to sway. Although engineers later calculated that the bridge hadn't come close to collapsing, it still was pretty nerve-racking.

But even if the people lucky enough to get on the bridge weren't worried about its impending collapse, they were hardly having a good time. Hot from being packed in like sardines and basically standing in the same place for a few hours, they probably wanted to stuff every magical moment up the nearest nostalgic old fart's ass. There were dogs shitting themselves scrawny from fear, & no way to avoid stepping in it. There were no bathrooms, and it was a battle to fight your way over to the rail. You were continually being poked & prodded by the idiots with bikes & strollers. (At least one biker was forced by the crowd to choose between going over the rail with his bike, or just watch it go over while he remained to "enjoy" the bridge walk. That's one bike that went bye-bye).

They finally cleared the bridge at noon, 2 hours behind schedule. Roughly half of the people who'd showed up never made it on to the bridge. Only a few people made it from one side to the other, & hardly any made a round trip. A few people tried to mark the occaison by jumping, but they were all stopped by ironworkers stationed on the outer catwalks. The only nice thing you can say about the whole thing is that the mob didn't panic & stampede.

Nonetheless, the old farts still are trying to tell us that it was yet another magical, though trying, day. Ha'. Just look at any picture of the crowd. You won't see a single smiling face, just 800,000 frowns.

Charles Willeford



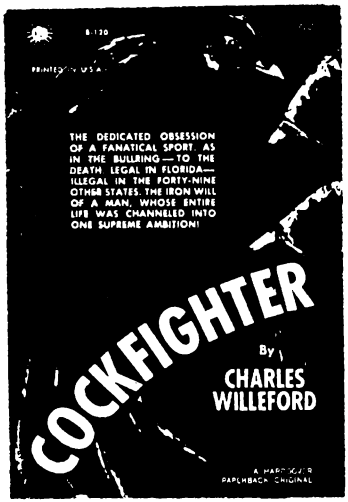
Veteran readers of MCBF (see #5) are already aware of my fanatical devotion to the works of Jim Thompson. Back in those bleak out-of-print days, it wasn't easy to be a Thompson fan. Even when you could find one of his books, chances were that its owner wouldn't part with if for love or money - only in trade for another Thompson.

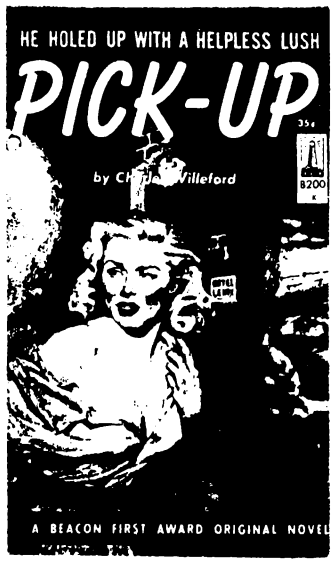
I was lucky enough to have a few duplicates for dealing with these types. My motto was: A Thompson for a Thompson, no exception. Then, at one paperback swap, I met this guy who just had to have my POP 1280. Being in a particularily nice mood that day, I let myself be talked into swapping it for a book by"the hot new author": COCKFIGHTER by Charles Willeford. (Besides, all the Thompson freaks already had copies of POP 1280!)

I started reading COCKFIGHTER that night, & by the end of the first chapter, I was hooked. I literally did not put the book down till I finished it at 2 that morning, whereupon I added to my official want list "and anything by Charles Willeford".

For want of a better sub-genre, Willeford's usually classed with hard-boiled crime writers like Thompson, McCoy, and Cain, and his books should appeal to all but the most prissy Cain fans. However, Willeford takes his own unique approach which should arouse even the most jaded. Most crime novels revolve around one (well, maybe a few) major crime: planning it, doing it, or getting away with it. Not Willeford's. He focuses in on the day-to-day existence of his characters, who just happen to range from stubborn monomaniacs to outright sociopaths: "I know the difference between right & wrong, but I don't give a shit".

The crimes are there, but they are things that happen, not what makes things happen. The gutters aren't choked with blood - Willeford's characters don't kill very often, only when they're in particularily foul moods. They prefer to use their hands - break that jaw, crack those ribs - when they want to have fun. This violence is not cartoonish, Mike Hammer stuff, but the real thing. (If you met a psycho on the street, odds are he'd break your face, not blow it away with a shotgun). And Willeford writes about it with a chilling casualness which


THE DEDICATED OBSESSION OF A FANATICAL SPORT, AS IN THE BULLRING—TO THE DEATH LEGAL IN FLORIDA—ILLEGAL IN THE FORTY-NINE OTHER STATES. THE IRON WILL OF A MAN, WHOSE ENTIRE LIFE WAS CHANNELLED INTO ONE SUPREME AMBITION!
COCKFIGHTER
By
CHARLES WILLEFORD
A MACFADDEN PAPERBACK ORIGINAL



heightens the impact. On dealing with a smart-mouthed parking sttendant (HIGH PRIEST OF CALIFORNIA):

"I kneed him in the crotch & as he bent over, I clasped my hands together & brought them down on the back of his neck. He groaned & chewed gravel...
Alice hadn't seen anything. 'Did you give him a tip?'
'Yeah'."

It doesn't come any tougher than that.

In the tradition of Kilgore Trout, HIGH PRIEST OF CALIFORNIA (Willeford's 1st novel) was originally published by a 2nd rate softcore '50s paperback house in spite of an almost complete lack of steamy sex. Russell Haxby is "the high priest", a title conferred by LIFE magazine on his profession: used car salesman. He's completely amoral, ruthless, & determined. Not only do you not want to by a used car from this man, you don't want to let him go out with your sister, either.

Russell meets Alyce Vitale, a naive San Francisco woman, at a public dance hall & immediatly decides he's going to bag her, no matter what it takes. No begging or pleading with him - instead, he manipulates & takes over Alyce's life in an incredibly lengthy campaign until it's wham-bang-get lost, ma'm. Along the way, there's all those little fun stunts Russell pulls to stay sharp, like pounding the parking attendant, starting barroom brawls, and cheating his customers. While even the most far gone notch-on-my-cock misogynist won't be able to identify with Russell, it still makes great reading.

Willeford continued to write excellent novels like PICK-UP and WILD WIVES for the next 10 years, only to see them disappear without a trace in the softcore racks. It wasn't until 1962 that he got out of the stiffener market & into the little-leagues of real paperbacks with COCKFIGHTER (which, incidentally, is about fighting gamecocks, not some weird kind of sadism) and THE MACHINE IN WARD 11.

In 1971, Willeford finally achieved some official respectability with his first hardback, THE BURNT ORANGE HERESY. Like Russell Haxby, James Figueras is one determined fellow,

but this time the goal is to become the most distinguished art critic in America, no matter who - or what - must be steamrolled on the way to the top. The action surrounds Figueras's efforts to interview the most important artist of the 20th century, Jaques Debierue, & to steal one of his paintings. Believe me, it's not as simple as it sounds. Willeford springs a few surprises that only someone as psychotic & ruthless as Figueras can handle.

Finally, in 1984, Willeford hit the big time with MIAMI BLUES. Freddy Frenger is Willeford's most (well..) psycho psychotic to date, but don't tell Freddy that. He thinks he's normal people. The hell of it, in Willeford's Miami, he is. The entire city's gone off its nut, the have-nots splitting the skulls of the haves for pocket change, while the haves pack shot guns to discourage them. Freddy knows home when he sees it, & celebrates his arrival at the airport by accidentally killing a Hare Krishna. This brings in the cops, & hero Hoke Mosley, but don't expect neato police methodology. The cop wanders through the nuthouse while the psycho trips through the funhouse, & every once in a while, they run into each other, with bloody results.

At last word, Willeford was recovering nicely from his 2nd heart attack & continues to crank 'em out. 2 more Mosleys since BLUES, with the next one copping a $200G advance. The reprinters are hard a work exhuming all his lost classics, & in a rare fit of taste, Hollywood has optioned MIAMI BLUES.

...and that guy from the swap is trying to get COCKFIGHTER back by offering me <u>two</u> Thompsons. Hah!

PROLETARIAN LAUGHTER (poetry, 1948)
HIGH PRIEST OF CALIFORNIA (1953)
PICK-UP (1954)
WILD WIVES (1956)
HONEY GAL (1957)
LUST IS A WOMAN (1957)
THE WOMAN CHASER (1960)
UNDERSTUDY FOR LOVE (1961)
NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY (1962)
COCKFIGHTER (1962)
THE MACHINE IN WARD ELEVEN (short stories, 1963)
POONTANG (poetry, 1967)
THE BURNT ORANGE HERESY (1971)
THE HOMBRE FROM SONORA (1971)
A GUIDE FOR THE UNDEHEMMORRHOIDED (non-fiction, 1977)
OFF THE WALL (1980)
MIAMI BLUES (1984)
NEW HOPE FOR THE DEAD (1985)
SOMETHING ABOUT A SOLDIER (non-fiction, 1986)
SIDESWIPE (1987)
NEW FORMS OF UGLY (lit crit, 1987)
KISS YOUR ASS GOODBYE (1987)

On Purchasing:

*SIDESWIPE, NEW HOPE FOR THE DEAD, and MIAMI BLUES can be found at any bookstore worth patronizing.

*A wonderfully elaborate double volume of HIGH PRIEST OF CALIFORNIA and WILD WIVES is available for $12 post-paid from RE/SEARCH, 20 Romolo Street, Ste. B/ San Francisco, CA 94133

*Black Lizard has put out paperbacks of COCKFIGHTER, PICK-UP, and THE BURNT ORANGE HERESY. If your local store isn't that cool, drop BL a line at 833 Bancroft/ Berkeley, CA 94710 and ask for their catalog.

Jaded Eyes On [redacted] Reader's Digest

You never find the READER'S DIGEST on the coffee tables of the terminally hip, unless said hipsters are uncool enough to live with their parents. It's hard to imagine a mag more mainstream than the RD. Most of their articles are reprints from such radical publications as NEWSWEEK and CATHOLIC DIGEST, condensed down to a 5th-grade reading level. The politics are invariably hard-line conservative, the attitudes hopelessly optimistic, and the tone cloyingly sentimental. Sounds pretty grim, right?

I read it every month without fail. The RD gets so far in its gung-ho America & What She Stands For trip that it reaches unconcious satire. It's so watered down & mindless that it's funny. You can't take this stuff seriously unless you've taken to hanging out in deep, deep right field while wearing your rose-colored glasses. Unfortunately, there are about 100 million plus readers every month (in 16 languages!) who do. Just don't let it bother you.

The RD loves to put in its 2¢ worth on the problems of modern society. Every month, there's a few articles on pressing problems like the homeless, poverty, crime, taxes, etc. They just don't like to think about them. They tell a few anecdotes about the problem: "James Doe of Dayton, O. is homeless." Then, they toss out a few statistics, a few quotes about how bad things are, and a few dire forecasts. But, in the world of the RD, everything must have a happy ending. They always offer solutions, bolstered by testimony by the more conservative members of Congress. Invariably, the answer is less Big Government, and more Private Enterprise. Isn't it nice to know that someone still believes in laissez faire?

Even better are the inspirational stories, about how one of our fellow citizens overcomes a handicap or some serious injury. And are they inspirational - they lay the inspiration on with a shovel so that even the dimmest reader can perceive that one's life doesn't end because of an amputation. However, more perceptive readers are apt to feel left out because their Mom didn't take thalidomide, they've never sufferred 80% 3rd degree burns, and, not only did they miss out of Vietnam, but they also will never know the pleasure of coming back minus a few arms & legs. Life of the whole & hearty is dull in comparison.

But nothing beats the RD when they go on a morally indignent crusade for the public good. They forget about their usual standards of good taste -- it's anything goes! Break out the "Red Asphalt" scare tactics. All auto accident fans must read their oft-reprinted "--and Sudden Death" from the '30s. In the '60s, it was smoking, complete with detailed descriptions of life in lung cancer wards. Today, it's teen drunk driving - check out this issue's centerfold. And tomorrow --? Child abuse? Runaways? Drugs redux? Whatever it is, it's sure to be shocking, tactless, and fun.

This just touches the surface of the mindless pleasures of the RD. There's also Drama in Real Life, useless self-help articles, insipidly heartwarming slices of Americana, modern day Algers, etc. in every issue. It's such a general interest magazine that you're sure to be interested in something, and you don't even have to buy it -- every library in the world subscribes.

READ HARD OR DIE

NUMBER ONE by Billy Martin w/ Peter Golenbock (Dell, 1980)
sports bio
Now, I'm always for hearing out both sides, but Billy is really pushing it in this (literally!) no-punches pulled autobiography. He claims to have never, ever started a single fight in his whole life. It's always been the other guy, even the marshmellow salesman, pickin' on poor little Billy. A monument to the art of rationalization.

DON'T BLAME THE MUSIC by Caroline Cooney (Berkley, 1986)
teen problem novel*
Obviously, Ms. Cooney's research began & ended with AND I DON'T WANT TO LIVE THIS LIFE. Poor little Susan is really having problems, as her schizoid Spungen-clone sister returns from the punk rock wars to garrote her dolls. Gosh, what will her preppie friends say? Of course, all the minor details are sufficently inauthentic to make this novel of "an angry young punk straight out of MTV" even more hilarious.

THE GIRL IN THE CENTERFOLD by Surrey Marshe (Dell, 1970)
anti-Playboy autobio
No,no, NO! This is not your standard gospel on Hef's evil empire. Neither Marx or the division of labor are mentioned once. Marshe (aka Miss January '68) simply tells about her experiences as a club Bunny & later a Playmate. Conclusion? Boring, stupid, & a complete waste of time - the experience, that is. Great stuff.

ANGEL LOVE NOBODY by Richard Miles (Dell, 1968)
novel
God, what a concept... Angel is an angry young JD who hates school, but he thinks big. He doesn't want to kill his teacher - he wants to organize his schoolmates & kill the entire faculty in one fell swoop. Think big, right? Too bad Miles completely fucks up the book by dwelling on the noble young teacher "who really understands the kids" and saves the faculties collective asses. This really should have been a classic...

FATAL FACTS by Long & Reim (Arlington House, 1986)
****trivial non-fiction****
While this book is a fairly comprehensive look at the way people kick, there's no doubt about what sense of humour they're trying to appeal to. (I call it black, my parents call it sick). Just be careful - it's also been published as KICK THE BUCKET

LE PETOMANE by Nohain & Cardec (Bell, 1985)
biography
Le Petomane (Joseph Pujol) was the Caruso of the asshole - his nightclub consisted solely of farts. Honest. He could fart a whole variety of noises at will, and climaxed his act by blowing out a candle at a distance of a foot. This is the kind of act I want to see in a club.

THE PROFESSOR & THE PROSTITUTE by Linda Wolfe (Ball., 1987)
true crime collection*
Murder meets the middle class. Lead story about some dumb prof who really falls for a pro, & wines her and dines her at her usual rate ($100/hr) until he goes broke, she leaves him, and he kills her. And so on. (Who says being yuppie means being smart?). Wolfe also does her fair share of homework & comes up with a few good theories of her own on the causes.

WILD STYLE by Hofler & Zarco (Fireside, 1985)
fashion*
Who needs Jessica Hahn in PLAYBOY when you get a bimbo on every page in this one, all dressed to boogie at the cool NYC clubs? A how-to book on how to get that "Wild Look", lavishly illustrated with people in the stupidest get-ups imaginable, ranging from pseudo punk to stupid punk. Beat your kids & laugh at it now.

THE BLACK LIZARD ANTHOLOGY OF CRIME FICTION (1987)
mystery anthology*
No mistake, this collection is Hard Boiled, complete with the usual tougher than though Hammett/Chandler variations. But when you're sick of the detectives, there's some real great nihilistic noir crime stories, including an almost-new Jim Thompson, which is worth the price alone.

ONLY THE GOOD DIE YOUNG by Robert Duncan (Harmony, 1986)
Rock bio collection
That is, dead rock star bios. A promising topic, but not when the writer is so obviously in awe of slobs like Morrison & Hendrix and takes his title seriously. (Only the good?). He only gets happy when he talks about Sid and Karen Carpenter. Although ROLLING STONE readers will love it, the only good part is the appendix, a sorta census of "Rock 'n' Roll Heaven".

TRUE TALES FROM THE ANNALS OF CRIME & RASCALITY by St. Clair McKelway (Modern Library)
THEY WENT WRONG by Croswell Bowen (Bantam, 1952)
true crime collections
Ordinarily, I'm no big NEW YORKER fan. Their articles may all be wonderfully written, but they always go on & on, endless pages of flwless prose looking for a point. The old NYer must have been different, because most of the pieces in these two collection appeared there with nary a meander. The crimes covered in these books aren't tabloid quality, but the authors make up for it with incredible perception & eye for detail. You might not believe it, but in the proper hands, a simple stick-up man can be more interesting than Charles Manson.

HAMMER OF THE GODS by Stephen Davis (Ballantine, 1986)
rock bio*
On the road with the king dinsaurs LED ZEPPLIN, from the cradle to their premature drug-induced retirement. If you love 'em, you're probably not reading this, but even if you hate 'em this book has its rewards. Rock star drug&sex orgies always make good reading, and Davis tells lots - not all, because this isn't an overblown press release or kiss&tell expose, but a reasonable look at the whole Zep phenom. Includes the full story of the groupie & the mud shark.

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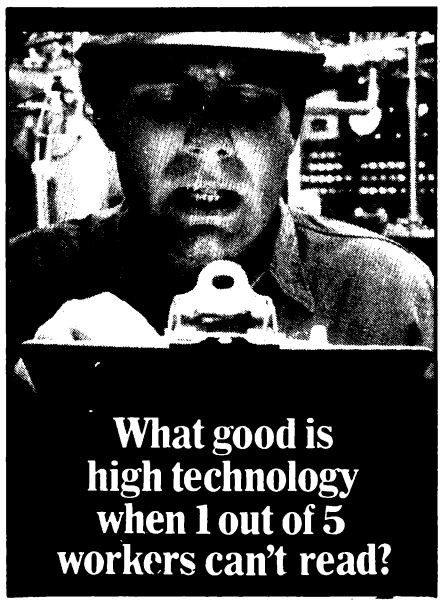

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